Israeli Adolescents' Self-Image Profile

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Seven hundred and seventy-two Jewish Israeli male and female high school students (aged 14–18) responded to a Hebrew version of the Offer Self-Image Questionnaire (OSIQ). Results show that, much like the American adolescents, the majority of the Israeli respondents are happy and well-adjusted, although a noticeable minority experiences some personal trouble. Gender and age differences show that males hold a more positive self-image than do females, and that age differences among males are larger than among females. Comparisons with the American norm sample indicate that the Israeli and American self-image profiles differ significantly on only three scales. Israelis report a higher impulse control, and lower morals and vocational and educational goals. These results are discussed in terms of ecological and cultural explanations, and the need for extending OSIQ research to additional sectors of Israeli society is noted.

INTRODUCTION

This study describes the phenomenological self of Israeli adolescents, assessed by means of the Offer Self-Image Questionnaire. The primacy of a self-image description to the understanding of adolescents and prediction of their behavior, by both adults and adolescents, is discussed by Offer, Ostrov, and Howard (1981a). These authors contend that, whether the objective is knowledge for its own sake, prediction of behavior, or empathic
relations with adolescents, its pursuit must also include knowing adolescents as they know themselves in a variety of personal and social realms. However, seeking to share some of the adolescents' experience of themselves, we should always bear in mind our position as outside observers. Moreover, we should remember that communication with psychologists entails a process of self-disclosure controlled by respondents' ability and readiness for such self-exposure.

That adolescents and adults hold different perceptions of adolescents has been demonstrated in two studies by Offer et al. (1981b, 1982b). The first study shows that mental health professionals view normal adolescents as more disturbed than these adolescents view themselves. The second study indicates that, compared to mental health professionals, parents' perceptions of their adolescent children are both more positive and similar to the adolescents' self-image, even though in some areas such as sexual and interpersonal relationships parents' perceptions differ from adolescents' self-image.

Cognizant of the importance of phenomenological self to the understanding of adolescent development, several Israeli psychologists have undertaken the assessment of adolescents' self-image (Apter, Galatzer, Beth-Halachmi, and Laron, 1981; see also Offer et al., 1977). The objective of the present study is to describe the self-image of a core segment (urban high school students) of Israeli adolescents. Our analysis will first focus on the various dimensions (selves) of Israeli adolescents as well as on gender and age differences, and will then draw the profile of Israeli adolescents' self-image relative to that of an American norm sample. The study thus follows the strategy employed earlier in the assessment of the self-image of non-American adolescents (e.g., Turner and Mo, 1984). However, the description of Israeli adolescents' self-image in terms of the American norms serves only for purposes of clarity of data reporting, and not as a "model" with which other cultural groups should be compared. Instead, the present analysis allows us to touch upon the extent to which adolescents' self-image reflects the universality of 20th-century living and the uniqueness of the adolescents' respective cultures.

METHOD

Subjects

Seven hundred and seventy two adolescents from two large comprehensive schools, in different geographical areas of Israel, participated in this study. One school consists of grades 10–12 and the other of grades 9–12. In terms of Offer et al. (1981a) distinction between younger and older adolescents, 138